A LETTER TO THE CLERGY OF THE DIOCESE OF CHESTER,

CONTAINING

PRECAUTIONS

RESPECTING THE

ROMAN CATHOLICS,

BY

(BEILBY,) LORD BISHOP OF THAT DIOCESE.

1781.

LONDON:

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BRITISH MUSEUM

REVEREND BRETHREN,

ON account of the peculiar circumſtances of my Dioceſe reſpecting the Roman Catholics, it has been for a long time paſt my intention to offer to your conſideration ſome precautions concerning them. But as an order was given laſt year by the Houſe of Lords to make an exact enquiry into the number of Papiſts in England and Wales, I thought it adviſeable to wait the reſult of that enumeration.

The Returns of this Survey (which I have reaſon to believe was made with great accuracy) were ſeveral months ago laid on the table of the Houſe of Peers, open to the inſpection of every Lord in the Houſe. From theſe it appears, that the trifling increaſe of the Roman Catholics, ſince the laſt Survey in 1767, is

exceedingly below what ſome well meaning but ill-informed people conceived it to be *, and even much leſs than might have been expected from the great increaſe of population throughout the kingdom in general; but eſpecially in the Dioceſe of Cheſter †. It appears, alſo, that the preſent number of Papiſts, compared with that of all the inhabitants in this country, is much too inconſiderable to cauſe the ſmalleſt alarm in any reaſonable mind ‡. And when to this we add,

* The number of Papiſts in England and Wales returned to the Houſe of Lords in 1767 was 67,916. In 1780—69,376. The difference is only 1460. It was affirmed in pamphlets and news-papers that converts to Popery were made by hundreds and thouſands every year.

† This growth of population ſince the Revolution, and eſpecially within the laſt fifty years, has been proved by Mr. Howlett in his *Examination of Dr. Price's Eſſay, &c.* lately publiſhed. He has ſhewn in p. 126, that in the Dioceſe of Cheſter only, there has been ſince the year 1717 an increaſe of 251,125 ſouls.

‡ Suppoſing, what Mr. Howlett has rendered probable, that the number of inhabitants in England and Wales

add, what is a well known fact, that ſeveral Roman Catholic gentlemen of the very firſt diſtinction, and of the largeſt fortunes, have of late years conformed to the Eſtabliſhed Church, and muſt undoubtedly have drawn after them many of their relations, friends and dependents, we may very reaſonably conclude, that the Church of Rome is, upon the whole, rather loſing than gaining ground amongſt us.

But altho' for theſe and many other reaſons, which might be aſſigned, it is evident that the Proteſtant religion in this kingdom can have nothing formidable to apprehend from ſo feeble a ſect; yet as it always has been and ſtill is much more numerous, and of courſe an object of more importance in the Dioceſe of Cheſter than in any other §; and as their

Wales amounts to eight millions, the Papiſts, who are under 70,000, do not make an hundredth part of the whole.

§ According to the Survey taken laſt year, the number of Papiſts in the Dioceſe of Cheſter is 27,228.

zeal to make proſelytes, and the artifices they ſometimes uſe for that purpoſe ought equally to be watched with a jealous eye, and guarded againſt with the greateſt caution; I therefore think it my duty to addreſs a few pages to you on this ſubject, and to lay before you the reſult of the information I have received (in conſequence of the late enquiry) from various parts of my Dioceſe.

It were greatly to be wiſhed, that we who profeſs ſo pure a faith ſhould be as ſolicitous to gain converts to it, as the Romaniſts are ſo propagate their ſuperſtitious and falſe doctrines. One reaſon why we are not, perhaps is, becauſe although we conſider their religion as a very corrupt one, yet we allow it poſſible for them to be ſaved in it; whereas *they* confine Salvation entirely within the pale of their own Church. This will certainly make the ſpirit of Proſelytiſm ſtronger in them than in us. Yet ſtill a little more earneſtneſs in the cauſe of truth than we commonly ſhew would highly become

become us; nor ought we to omit any favourable opportunity of converting a Papiſt "from the error of his ways," whenever we can do it by fair arguments and honourable means. But undoubtedly we ſhall be in a high degree culpable, if we do not at leaſt ſtand reſolutely upon the defenſive, and exert our utmoſt endeavours to protect thoſe who are under our care from the ſeductions of Popery. I do not indeed find, after the ſtricteſt examination into the fact, that the number of converts made of late years to the Church of Rome is at all conſiderable, not even in thoſe parts of the Dioceſe of Cheſter, where the Roman Catholics are moſt numerous and powerful. The few that have been perverted are almoſt all of the loweſt rank and the loweſt underſtanding, and ſcarce any of them are proſelytes on principle, or on the ground of fair and open reaſoning. The means generally made uſe of to ſeduce them are (as I am informed from various quarters) theſe that follow:

1ſt, That moſt powerful of all arguments *a bribe* is frequently offered to the ignorant ruſtic. Sometimes a ſmall ſum of money is the bait; ſometimes the crumbs which fall from a rich man's table; ſometimes the promiſes of an eſtabliſhment in a little farm, or a profitable trade. Every lure, in ſhort, is tried in its turn, till an effectual one is found out: and the frailty of human nature is too well known to ſuppoſe it will not ſometimes give way to temptations of this kind, ſo artfully accommodated to the diſpoſition of the ſubject to be practiſed on. To minds uncultivated by education and unſupported by principle, they too often prove irreſiſtible; and it can be no great wonder, if a poor labourer is now and then prevailed on to renounce his religion, as Eſau did his birthright, for a meſs of pottage.

2. Another method by which converts are not uncommonly made to the Romiſh Communion is, the intermarriage of Papiſts and Proteſtants. In the higher claſſes of life theſe marriages (though in moſt

moſt caſes hazardous) are not always attended with bad conſequences; ſuch ſtipulations being uſually made before hand as ſecure each party and their children in the undiſturbed enjoyment of their reſpective religions. But in the lower ranks of people ſuch precautions being ſeldom uſed, they too often "make ſhipwreck of their faith." It muſt be owned indeed, that the Church of England is ſometimes a gainer by theſe intermarriages as well as the Church of Rome. But the balance is, I fear, upon the whole, in favour of the latter. For which ever of the two parties happens to be the Papiſt, that party being generally more earneſt and expert in the buſineſs of Proſelytiſm, than the other, is too frequently ſucceſsful; and the purſuaſive arts of the wife, or the menaces and ſometimes violences of the huſband, when exerted with zeal and perſeverance, ſeldom fail to carry their point at laſt.

3. A third contrivance, and I fear the moſt miſchievous one of all, is that of Roman Catholic gentlemen taking ſer-

vants or labourers, and tradeſmen taking apprentices, of the Proteſtant Religion, in order to *reconcile them* (as it is called) to the Church of Rome. I know indeed, that there are many gentlemen of that Communion who diſdain ſuch practices as theſe; who have the liberality to inſiſt on all their Proteſtant ſervants conſtantly attending the pariſh church; who reſtrain their Prieſts from the leaſt attempt to pervert the principles of their domeſtics, and diſtribute their favours and their charity indiſcriminately and impartially both to Papiſts and Proteſtants. This generoſity of conduct certainly deſerves great praiſe. But there are others (as I have reaſon to believe) of that perſuaſion who act differently, and who either encourage or connive at the converſion of their Proteſtant ſervants. The danger is, I believe, ſtill greater in the caſe of Popiſh tradeſmen, and their Proteſtant apprentices. Some of theſe maſters, I am aſſured, take very improper methods to work upon the minds of the young people who are under their roof;

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and although these may sometimes have the fortitude and sense to resist, yet when a poor lad is given up into the hands of a rigid bigot, for the long term of seven years, it is easy to see that the contest between them must be a very unequal one.

These then being the principal expedients to which the Roman Catholics have recourse to disseminate their superstitions, it must be unnecessary to remind you, that to counteract these stratagems should be one great object of your care and attention. And the most effectual way of doing this I conceive, will be to make use of *preventive* remedies; to guard your people by early and frequent cautions against the seductions, and to exhort them in the most earnest manner, both in public and in private, not to form such connections as are apt to prove so dangerous to their religious principles. To those whose proverty is likely to prove a snare to them, you will represent in the strongest terms, the extreme folly as well as wickedness of bartering their religion for gold; and will point out to

them that moſt forcible expoſtulation of holy writ ſo applicable to their caſe: "what is a man profited if he ſhould gain the whole world, and loſe his own ſoul?" You will endeavour to convince them, that if they will but bear up under their preſent difficulties with Chriſtian fortitude, and "poſſeſs their ſouls in patience," if they will but preſerve their faith and integrity unſhaken, and after doing their utmoſt to maintain themſelves in an honeſt way, "caſt all their care upon God," and truſt in his gracious Providence for their ſupport, he will not fail to extricate them in his good time out of their diſtreſs. Let them only "ſeek firſt the kingdom of God and his righteouſneſs," and perſevere in that pure mode of worſhip in which they have been brought up, and they may depend upon it, that all other things, which are really neceſſary for them, will, by the bleſſing of Heaven on their virtuous induſtry "be added to them:" and that they may always find out the means of ſupporting themſelves and their families comfortably

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in this world, without forfeiting by a venal converſion their everlaſting ſalvation in the next.

With reſpect to young perſons, their ſecurity muſt altogether depend on the care taken of them by their parents, relations, guardians or friends. Theſe, therefore, you will not fail to diſſuade in the moſt earneſt manner from the practice of ſuffering their children or wards to enter either as Servants or Apprentices into Roman Catholic families, where although they *may*, and ſometimes *do*, through the moderation and good ſenſe of the maſter, continue unſolicited and untainted; yet the danger of their being ſeduced is certainly very great. To expoſe them to ſo much temptation is an act of great cruelty and injuſtice; and it is the more unpardonable, becauſe it cannot be defended on the plea either of neceſſity or of intereſt. There is much greater choice both of ſervices and of trades in Proteſtant than in Popiſh families, and their advantage in every point of view will commonly be much better

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conſulted by placing them in the former than in the latter. Why therefore their eternal intereſts are to be wantonly riſqued where the gain can be nothing, and the loſs may be infinite, is a queſtion which ought to be well conſidered, and preſſed home on the conſciences of thoſe who are concerned to anſwer it †.

In the caſe of marriages it may be a matter of more delicacy for the Miniſter to interfere, eſpecially where there is on both ſides a ſtrong and ſincere affection. Yet even here it will be acting a fair and a friendly part to apprize the Proteſtant party in time of the danger and inconvenience of ſuch alliances; that whatever choice is made may be made at leaſt with a clear apprehenſion of the probable conſequences, and as much care

† Particular care ſhould be taken with reſpect to thoſe poor children that are apprenticed out by pariſh officers; who will ſome times ignorantly, and ſome times deſignedly bind them to Papiſts in order to ſave a few pounds. I have even heard of ſuch a thing as *a Popiſh Overſeer*, which is ſurely a very ſingular and irregular, a very improper appointment.

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may be taken as is poſſible to guard againſt them by preliminary articles. But as theſe contracts are moſt common among the lower orders of the people, and generally take their riſe from worldly and intereſted motives, it is a matter of duty as well as an act of common humanity, to make them ſenſible how little comfort can be expected from an union founded on ſuch ſordid views, and how miſerably they conſult their preſent peace, as well as their future felicity, by connections at once ſo mercenary and ſo unnatural.

There is ſtill one point more that deſerves conſideration, and that is, the Schools kept by Roman Catholics, where Proteſtant as well as Popiſh children are ſometimes taught. Theſe ſchools, I muſt confeſs, have always appeared to me to be attended with ſome degree of danger. Their own children, let them, if they pleaſe, educate in their own way and by their own inſtructors. To reſtrain them from this would be a meaſure as contrary to all ſound policy, as it certainly is to

every

every principle of juſtice and humanity. It could have no other effect than that of forcing their youth to Romiſh ſeminaries abroad, where they would probably imbibe much groſſer ſuperſtitions, and political ſentiments much more hoſtile to the Engliſh conſtitution, than they could poſſibly learn in this country. It would therefore be very unwiſe, as well as very cruel, to ſuppreſs all places of education for Roman Catholics. But it does not ſeem to me neceſſary on any grounds either of wiſdom or humanity, to intruſt them with the education of Proteſtant children. It gives them too many opportunities of infuſing their prejudices inſenſibly into the tender minds of youth, and making ſuch early and deep impreſſions upon them, as it may be difficult if not impoſſible afterwards to efface. It his however doing them but common juſtice, to acknowledge that no complaints of this nature have come to me from my own Dioceſe; and although a few converſions have been effected there by the means above-mentioned, yet I have not hitherto been

been made acquainted with a ſingle one that has been brought about in any Popiſh School.

This ſhews that there is either more indifference, or more liberality of ſentiment, in ſome of theſe people than one ſhould naturally expect; yet ſtill as I do not chuſe to truſt a matter of ſo much importance as the firſt religious notions of a child to the direction of perſons who have generally been more celebrated for their zeal than their prudence, I muſt intreat you to make uſe of every argument you can think of, to convince your pariſhioners of the extreme impropriety and danger of ſending their children to Popiſh Schools. The remedy for this evil is plainly in our own hands. If no Proteſtants will allow their children to attend ſuch Schools, no Proteſtants can ever be taught there. The practice indeed I hope is not very common, and there certainly cannot be the leaſt ſhadow of an excuſe for it in any part of England; but leaſt of all in this Dioceſe, which abounds more in excellent Proteſtant Schools,

adapted

adapted to all classes of people from the highest to the lowest, than any other district of the kingdom that I am acquainted with. There can be no other possible inducement for placing them in Roman Catholic Schools, than that of having them taught at a cheaper rate, or perhaps without any expence at all; which is an object so mean, when set in competition with the mischief it may draw after it, that I should hope you would find it no difficult matter to make the very lowest of the people ashamed of it.

But besides the preventive measures which have been here touched upon, there is still another no less necessary. For it must after all be confessed, that the surest way in every instance to guard against error, is to lay early and deep the foundations of truth. You cannot therefore more effectually secure your Parishioners against the delusions of Popery, than by carefully instilling into their minds when young, the grounds and rudiments of the Protestant Faith. The obvious method of doing this is by explaining

plaining to them (as I am perſuaded you fail not to do) carefully and familiarly every part of the Church Catechiſm; which beſides furniſhing them with the firſt principles of Chriſtianity, will afford you frequent opportunities of pointing out and expoſing the principal corruptions of the Church of Rome. This you will ſee done with admirable judgment and ſkill in a book which I am happy to find you are all perfectly well acquainted with, *Archbiſhop Secker's Lectures on the Church Catechiſm.* When once you have brought your pariſhioners well acquainted with this excellent ſummary of Chriſtian Faith and Practice, and alſo with thoſe parts of Holy Scripture which are moſt plain and level to their capacities, there will, I hope, be little danger of their becoming proſelytes to the Romiſh Communion.

But as a ſtill further ſecurity, I would beg leave to recommend to you for their uſe another work of the ſame excellent Prelate, viz. his *Five Sermons againſt Popery*, which are to be found in the ſixth volume

volume of his Miſcellaneous Sermons. As thoſe Five Sermons contain the beſt and moſt maſterly Confutation of the Romiſh Faith that is to be found in our language in ſo ſmall a compaſs; and as it would not be eaſy for every one to get acceſs to them in the voluminous collection in which they were originally publiſhed; for theſe reaſons I have lately detached them from his works, and thrown them into the form of a little Tract, entitled *A Brief Confutation of the Errors of the Church of Rome*. Some hundreds of theſe I have ordered to be ſent into thoſe parts of my Dioceſe where the Roman Catholics are moſt numerous, and if more ſhould be wanted, they may be had by applying to the Publiſhers, *Meſſrs. John Rivington and Sons, in St. Paul's Church-yard, London* *. Many other ſtill ſmaller Tracts of this ſort are ſold at a very eaſy rate by the ſame *Society*, which it may be convenient ſometimes to diſtribute amongſt you pariſhioners, eſpecially of the younger ſort. Several of theſe are

* Or to the Society for promoting Chriſtian Knowledge.

very

very well calculated to preſerve the ignorant and unwary from the artifices of Popery; and as one of theſe artifices is ſaid to be the circulation of ſmall books adapted to the capacities of the vulgar, it may be prudent, in this inſtance, to imitate their example, and vanquiſh them with their own weapons †.

Should you find any larger treatiſe on this ſubject neceſſary, there is a very excellent one publiſhed a few years ſince in one octavo volume, by the Rev. Mr. Smith. He was formerly a Prieſt in the Church of Rome; became a convert to the Church of England from principle;

† Thoſe clergymen who are not already members of the *Society* above-mentioned *for promoting Chriſtian Knowledge*, and whoſe circumſtances will allow it, I would earneſtly recommend their becoming ſo without delay. The expence is trifling; the uſe may be great. The diſtribution of the little religious tracts belonging to the Society, will in ſome meaſure ſupply the want of what I fear is too much diſuſed amongſt us—*perſonal conference* with our pariſhioners. Proper information concerning the mode and terms of admiſſion may be had by writing to the Rev. Mr. *Hallings, Secretary to the Society, in Bartlett's Buildings, Holborn, London.*

was admitted into it by Archbiſhop Secker; and has now, by the kindneſs of the preſent Archbiſhop of Canterbury, preferment in Kent. This book contains much curious information and learning on the Popiſh controverſy; and as he had opportunities of knowing what thoſe points are on which the Romaniſts reſt the chief ſtrength of their cauſe, he has ſet himſelf to combat theſe with peculiar earneſtneſs and ſingular ſucceſs *.

All theſe precautions are, as you will perceive, perfectly conſiſtent with that gentleneſs of manners and humanity of deportment, which the Scriptures ſo ſtrongly enjoin even towards our enemies, and which have always ſo eminently diſtinguiſhed your treatment of your Roman Catholic neighbours. God forbid that the glorious cauſe of Proteſtantiſm ſhould ever ſtand in need of cruelty, oppreſſion, or perſecution to ſupport it! It has, I truſt, much better and more evan-

* The title of Mr. Smith's book is, *The Errors of the Church of Rome detected, in ten Dialogues*, &c. It is ſold by Johnſon in St. Paul's Church-yard, London.

gelical

gelical means of defending itſelf than theſe. Theſe are the arms of falſehood and bigottry. The arms of a Proteſtant are of a very different temper, and very different materials; *reaſon*, *argument*, *perſuaſion*, and above all, *the word of God*. His religion is the religion of the goſpel, and the goſpel, we all know, allows of no other force in religion but the force of truth; no other ſword but that of the Spirit. The true ſecret, in ſhort, for checking the growth of Popery, or of any other corrupt religion is, LENITY AND VIGILANCE IN CONJUNCTION. This is the conduct which Divine Wiſdom itſelf has recommended; and human wiſdom will not find out a better. "Be ye wiſe as ſerpents," ſays the divine oracle, "and harmleſs as doves." This precept then my brethren, you will, I am confident, moſt punctually fulfil. You will be *wiſe as ſerpents* in guarding againſt the ſeductions of the Romaniſts, and *harmleſs as doves* towards their properties and their perſons. By arts ſuch as theſe you will not only prevent their errors from mak-

ing any progreſs amongſt us, but will alſo probably gain many converts from them to your own Communion. For there cannot be a more effectual way to win the hearts, and ſubdue the prejudices, even of the moſt bigotted and ſuperſtitious, than to convince them by the mildneſs and benevolence of your conduct, that the religion which prompts it is the only true evangelical religion; that it is the religion of him who "was meek and lowly in heart," who would ſuffer no ſword to be drawn, no fire to be brought down from heaven, on his enemies; who declared on the contrary that he came "not to deſtroy men's lives but to ſave them;" and whoſe great object it evidently was in every inſtance to bring peace on earth, and diffuſe good-will amongſt men.

I am, reverend Brethren,

Your affectionate friend,

Cheſter, Sept. 15, 1781.

and faithful ſervant,

B. CHESTER.

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